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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000483

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE: 11/8: BAINIMARAMA SPEAKS; DENIES
REFORM DEADLINE

REF: SUVA 479

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

1. (C) Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama spoke to the media for the first time since returning from abroad last weekend. He raised many previous themes and attacked PM Qarase for a litany of faults, a number of them relating to events of 2000, others more recent. Bainimarama said the RFMF understands its subservient role, but it does not consider the current situation democratic. He asked foreigners to see both sides of the story, while renewing the RFMF's verbal attack on Australia. He defended himself and the RFMF in the face of police investigations. He concluded that, sadly, a barrage of lies is taking Fiji "fast into the abyss." Reportedly, Bainimarama told the press he has set no time frame for Qarase to resign, though the prepared remarks did not include that statement. In the meantime, the RFMF plans to keep reserves in camp for an additional week, and a meeting Police Commissioner Hughes has sought with Bainimarama has been postponed until at least next week. End summary.

RFMF planning next steps

2. (C) RFMF senior officers were huddled in a meeting at Queen Elizabeth Barracks for much of Wed. Nov. 8. They reportedly were discussing Commodore Bainimarama's participation in tomorrow's Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) meeting and preparing Bainimarama for a media conference today (see below), his first public appearance since returning to Fiji last weekend. The RFMF spokesman later reported to us that Bainimarama intends to be very outspoken before the GCC. Per below, he followed the same course with the media, regenerating familiar themes. The one new and significant element appeared to be a reported brief mention during Q&A that the RFMF has no time frame for PM Qarase to resign.

Attacks on Qarase, a villain of 2000

3. (U) In prepared remarks, Bainimarama accused PM Qarase of misleading the nation, and said the recent attempt to remove him as Commander RFMF showed "the lack of integrity, moral courage, and sound judgment which has been the hallmark of Qarase's leadership." Bainimarama complained that Qarase has regularly visited a high chief in jail, where the chief is serving a sentence for 2000 coup/mutiny-related crimes, to seek policy advice. Bainimarama repeatedly referred to 2000, saying "we must address the past to be able to move forward." He described the reconciliation (RTUB) bill as an "endorsement of the 2000 crisis." He suggested the Great

Council of Chiefs (GCC) is used only when it suits the government's agenda. He said the Qarase government "continues to misread the military and its resolve to once and for all rid Fiji of the lies that George Speight brought to the land and which has continued with Qarase and his leadership." Bainimarama alluded to two rumored meetings from 2000 that he has privately alleged implicated Qarase in efforts to subvert the Presidency.

RFMF understands its subservient role; but...

14. (U) Bainimarama gave assurance that the RFMF understands "better than most people think we do" that the military should be subservient "to the political masters." However, "with the current leadership, we do not see Fiji as democratic." He noted Fiji has had coups and "unless the government finds ways and means to rid Fiji of this coup mentality we cannot see ourselves as free." He said that requires good governance. He decried the 2006 elections that were "flawed in all aspects." He referred to the "agriculture scam" trial now under way in Suva as evidence of past problems. He said the RFMF supports the multi-party government, but he expressed skepticism about any meaningful accomplishments. Bainimarama described the RFMF as representing the "silent majority" that won't entertain recent government policies and a continuation of the wrongs of 2000. Bainimarama said "claims have been made that the RFMF wants to lead the country, but we would like to reiterate that our concern is for good governance and nothing more. We do not want them to resign unless they change the direction our ship is heading (sic)."

A plea for foreigners to see both sides of the story

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15. (U) Bainimarama raised the issue of 8 Australians who he believes entered Fiji suspiciously. He said the Australian DATT denied any knowledge of them, so the RFMF will consider them "mercenaries." On the other hand, Bainimarama said New Zealand had acted appropriately concerning their additional personnel. He turned to the international community and asked them to see "two sides of the story and not persecute us too quickly" since the people of Fiji everyday see "Fijian politics at its worst."

Surprise at Police Commissioner's change in attitude

16. (U) Bainimarama expressed surprise at the Commissioner of Police's "recent change in attitude" toward the RFMF which "has caused unnecessary tension." Bainimarama said the decision to investigate him "is not in the interest of crime prevention" but is to remove him from office as a result of political pressure. Bainimarama defended the RFMF's removal of ammunition from the Suva wharf.

A barrage of lies...taking Fiji fast into the abyss

17. (U) Bainimarama concluded with attacks on a couple of his Fijian nationalist critics, saying there has been a "barrage of lies" that is "taking this wonderful country called Fiji fast into the abyss."

Watering down of ultimatum?

18. (U) An observer at the press conference reportedly heard Bainimarama say his only demands are that controversial bills be withdrawn and that Qarase practice good governance. The Commodore reportedly said he has set no time frame for Qarase to resign, and as soon as the PM is ready to talk on the issues, Bainimarama will meet with him. The prepared text did not include those themes.

Military camp extended a week

19. (U) In the meantime, Captain Teleni announced that a

military training camp for a thousand or more reservist (territorial) troops that was to end on Sunday has now been extended to Friday, Nov. 17. Teleni reportedly told the troops that they should remain "firm and loyal" to the RFMF, remembering that "whatever is happening in Fiji today is God's calling on the military."

Police Commissioner meeting with Bainimarama put off

¶10. (U) Police Commissioner Hughes reportedly has heard from the RFMF that Bainimarama will not be available to meet until at least next week. He is "on leave."

Comment

¶11. (C) Commodore Bainimarama's press conference was vintage Frank. He hit many past themes, including his perception that the Qarase Government needs to shape up or ship out; and his doubts about Qarase's motives for Fiji. The remark about the RFMF recognizing its subservient role is worth noting, although it is hard to reconcile that statement with so many of his other recent statements, including aspects of today's remarks. Thankfully, Bainimarama did not reiterate an ultimatum on resignation, though presumably one quote (see para 4) was intended to regurgitate the resignation theme in general.

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